



In Step

A NEWSLETTER FOR ROLE MODELS

Following in the Footsteps of Creative Women

Creative women are terrific. They see a problem, figure out a way to solve it, and then they make things happen. In this issue of *In Step* you'll meet some women with very inventive minds, women who found ways of making things better for others and for themselves. Creativity is something we can all bring to our work. We can use our creative imaginations to come up with new ways of doing things and new ways of thinking about things that affect us in our work and in our personal lives.

Of course, Stepping Stones role models already know about taking creative steps forward, in everything from balancing the demands of work and family to making others aware of the rewards of pursuing a chosen career.

Canadian women, Alberta women, are inventing careers for themselves and discovering the trials, tribulations and joys of trying to build a better mousetrap. Like Stepping Stones role models, they are providing a very important example to young women,

showing them that not only is it possible to dream, but that those dreams can also become reality.

Also in this issue you'll read about women who are making creative contributions of their own by working in non-traditional fields. It's great to welcome new role models who are working in the trades area and it's exciting to think about the possibilities available to women in skilled trades. The example of these women and of all role models is important. Your contributions count, not just now but in our province's future. By demonstrating to young girls what is possible, you are helping to ensure that we have a diverse and well-trained workforce. There is no better way to inspire a young girl than by giving her a chance to meet a woman who thoroughly enjoys the challenges and benefits of her chosen field.

Did you know?

- The best-selling board game **Balderdash** was invented by Laura Robinson of Toronto.
- Whiz kid Rachel Zimmerman of London, Ontario designed a computer software program based on the **BLISSYMBOLICS** system which helps people who are unable to speak or write to communicate more easily and effectively. Rachel was all of 13 when she developed her invention.
- Dr. Terri Allan of the University of Alberta invented **liposome**, an improved drug delivery system for cancer patients.
- Helen Salter went to work on a British Columbia fishing boat and caught a good idea. Her skipper thought the idea might float, so they built sixty collapsible wooden prawn traps and tested them. The traps worked very well and saved a lot of space on the boat. Once back on the Vancouver shore, Helen set about manufacturing and selling her good idea.
- Inventor and innovator Anna Sutherland Bissell and her husband took their Bissell Carpet Sweeper Co. to the United States where you could say they cleaned up. Anna managed the very successful company for several years after her husband's death.
- Deborah New's interest in language development got her wondering how deaf children could get speech and sound information. After doing some electrical research, her therapy device for the deaf was invented on her kitchen table. A screen shows deaf people a visual response to sounds in their environment or to the sounds of their own voices.

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Women Just Keep Coming Up With Better And Better Ideas

Inventive women are not a new phenomenon. In fact, according to the newly-published book, *Feminine Ingenuity*, women inventors and innovators have been around for hundreds of years. The difference is now we're finding out about them.

Often it seems that women have looked at their own lives and have come up with better, more practical ways of doing things. Such was the case with Olivia Poole of North Vancouver. She got an idea from a traditional native baby support, a device which hung from a tree branch by leather thongs. Her result, The Jolly Jumper, has saved the sanity of many a harried parent.

Some inventive women have seen others' problems and have developed something to help. That's what happened in Gillian Loban's case. A weaving teacher for 10 years in Calgary craft stores, she was asked to teach weaving at the Canadian National Institute for the Blind in Calgary. Gillian discovered a lot of the available equipment wasn't suitable. And, as she says, that started her thinking, "What if I could design something that was really secure?"

With a class weaving away in the background, Gillian sketched out a design and immediately saw its possibilities. The result was Freehand™, a clamp-based crafts holder. Freehand™ is a system of frames designed to clamp to hospital bed tables and expandable enough to fit up to the thickness of a picnic table.



Inventor Gillian Loban demonstrates Freehand™

Its stability allows people to concentrate on doing needlework, weaving or artwork without having to hold on to the work itself. Gillian describes her invention this way: "Freehand™ was designed with the idea that it could be used by the smallest child to the oldest person who needed it."

Coming up with a good idea and turning it into a marketable product are quite different challenges. Gillian and her husband Conrad soon realized they would have to do it all themselves, overseeing manufacturing, distribution and marketing. One thing she knew right from the start —

Freehand™ had to be attractive: "Tools have to be beautiful or the product won't be any good."

And so Freehand™ was patented and the Freehand Fibercraft Co. Ltd. was created. The 100% wooden units are manufactured in Alberta and their widest use is in hospitals and nursing homes.

Now in semi-retirement, the Lobans have had Freehand™ in the marketplace for 10 years. They haven't totally given up the business but they aren't spending much time on it either. Whenever Gillian does think about shutting down, she'll meet someone who tells her how valuable and

important her invention has been to them.

Inventive women have made a difference to all of our lives. There are the American women who have dreamed up everything from windshield wipers and fire escapes to Snugglis. Chemist Jane Rideout led the team of researchers which got the patent for AZT, a drug used in the treatment of AIDS. Canadian women too are making their mark. Manitoba's Carolyn Gelhorn came up with TRIPTRAC, a small car computer for recording mileage and other information. Dr. Beverly Brodie and Debbie Lord took a Thai idea and co-invented THE BABY SAFE, a padded weight to hold a baby on its side to prevent choking and smothering. Thai women use bags of rice for the same purpose. Suzanne Johns' solution to her problems with PMS (pre-menstrual syndrome) is her PMS Survival Kit. The Halifax woman sells her kits by mail order and designed the box herself. The kit contains herbal teas, anti-stress bath salts and sugar-free and low-sugar chocolates as well as suggestions for other things women can try to ease their PMS difficulties.

Where there are women with good ideas, practical and useful inventions seem sure to follow.

(*Feminine Ingenuity* by Anne Macdonald is published by Random House.)

Got a Good Idea? Here's What to Do!

The Women Inventors Project has been a front-runner in promoting the work of Canadian women innovators and inventors. Created by two Ontario women, Dr. Shelly Beauchamp, a biochemist and technical analyst, and Lisa Avedon, an adult educator interested in women's learning, the project assists inventive women.

The two founders invested some of their own money, did some market research to help them obtain other funding and, in March 1987, the project sponsored a pilot workshop for 25 women inventors from six provinces. They tested out ideas for what became *The Book For Women Who Invent or Want To*.

Written in an up-beat conversational style, the book is a must for any woman who wants to make the most of her good idea. The authors begin with the novel idea and take it through market research, money, manufacturing, marketing and other areas. The book includes anecdotes from project co-director, Chips Klein, a former Flamenco dancer and the inventor of The

Eye Maker™ line of makeup mirrors. The book also has a section on how women can get together and form local inventors' groups so they can learn from and help each other.

The Women Inventors Project has produced the exhibit, "Women of Invention/Femme d'invention" which is currently touring the country and is booked through 1994. Coming soon is an interactive poster kit for students featuring a computer database with information on 150 scientists and innovators. Computer games and creative research tools will be included. For those without computer access, a manual featuring the 150 women, puzzles, trivia and games will be available along with a portable exhibit.

(For copies of *The Book For Women Who Invent or Want To* or for information on the Women Inventors Project, contact the project at 1 Greensboro Drive, Suite 302, Etobicoke, Ontario M9W 1C8, telephone (416) 243-0668, fax (416) 243-0688.)

Building from the Ground Up: The New Women's Work



Barbara Long

While more and more women can be found with hammer in hand repairing and renovating their own homes, not many end up in the construction business. Barbara Long, a new Stepping Stones role model, is an exception. She decided four years ago to turn her skills into a business venture when she launched BAL Handywoman Services in Calgary. "Growing up with tools," and working with her builder father, Barbara has turned the hobby which gave her enormous pleasure and satisfaction into a full-time occupation. For the past two years she has operated her business out of St. Albert.

And she's busy. Her focus

was renovating older homes, but this summer she began to build houses from the ground up. Working on the Sunchild Reserve, she is demonstrating not only her remarkable skills as a carpenter, but she is also doing what she likes best — teaching others the knowledge necessary to do their own work.

How has being a woman affected her career? "It has been a help," she explains. Her clients, men and women alike, are not threatened by her expertise when she shows how willing she is to pass it on. Her policy of mutual respect on and off the job-site becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy in her work. She says men on

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construction crews treat her considerably and without discrimination.

A work-week of 16-18 hour days, contracts from St. Albert to Texas, a long list of satisfied customers, and an environmentally-conscious working approach make her a business success. What does she think is the greatest payoff in having her own business? "Confidence," she says, "being your own boss — there's nothing like it!" One of Barbara's goals is to write a book on home maintenance for women, including information on how to hire a good contractor. Barbara's motto, "Life's an adventure!" takes her into new challenges almost daily.

Following in the steel-toed bootprints of women like Barbara is 16-year-old Sara Mallett. Her interest in the construction industry (like Barbara, her father is in the business) led her to summer employment as a labourer at Dow Chemical Canada Inc.'s



Sara Mallett

Fort Saskatchewan site. One of two female labourers working at her project site, Sara helped

a welder. Her job required her to assist with grinding down the areas which would be

subsequently patched with heated extruded plastic sheets. She also moved sandbags. Sara's job taught her how to relate to people, particularly her male co-workers. When she started she was the only female on the crew and she was a bit uneasy. After the first week things changed and, she adds, "I learned how to become one of the guys."

Although she worked 12-hour days with few days off, Sara says her summer was fun: she was busy, she liked working outdoors, and, she quips, the pay sure beat a mall job. Her least favourite part of the job was working in the cold and wet, up to her knees in mud.

A grade 11 student at Edmonton's Victoria Composite, Sara continued her summer job into the fall, working weekend days at Dow. Her experience there has provided Sara with a good foundation to build on as she is considering a career in the construction industry.

Celebrating Alberta's Most Famous Role Models

Women have long been inspired by the dedication and determination of the Famous Five. These Alberta women — Henrietta Edwards, Nellie McClung, Louise McKinney, Emily Murphy and Irene Parlyby — fought to gain Canadian women status as persons in the eyes of the law. Persons Day, celebrated October 18, commemorates the day in 1929 when the British Privy Council delivered its historic decision that women were indeed persons. Inspired by these foremothers, two modern-day Edmonton women came up with an idea they hope will catch on with women all over Canada.

Their idea? A Persons Day Party. The two women opted to honour both the Famous Five and a mutual friend. The Famous Five were represented by posters and banners and guests were asked to bring something to represent their relationship with the woman being honoured. All mementos were included in a tribute book which was presented to her at the end of the evening. Each guest spoke briefly about her contribution and the evening proceeded with much laughter and a few tears. The party became a celebration of decades of friendship.

The two women hope that other women will use their Persons Day party idea to celebrate not only women of the past but also the present and future.

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